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SUBJECT: DRL OFFICER'S VISIT HIGHLIGHTS GRAVITY OF CHILD  
LABOR PROBLEM IN THE DRC

1. (U) Summary: During an October 12-19 visit to the DRC, DRL Foreign Affairs Officer Tu Dang met with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs, labor unions and other civil society organizations to discuss labor and corporate social responsibility issues. She also toured the Gecamines mining site in Kipushi, Katanga province. Embassy Kinshasa Economic/Commercial FSN employee Nkandamana Kabangu accompanied Ms. Tu Dang during her visit. Throughout her trip, both GDRC officials and NGO activists confirmed the existence of child labor in the DRC's mining sector. They also outlined several programs for combating this problem. Post will continue to pressure the DRC government to improve its performance on child and forced labor issues and welcomes additional visits by DRL as an opportunity to advocate and educate the GDRC on these issues. End summary.

Background Information on visit to Kinshasa and Lubumbashi

2. (U) In September 2008, DRL Assistant Secretary David Kramer and DAS Jeff Krilla visited Kinshasa and met with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (GDRC) to discuss our shared interest in promoting worker rights and combating forced labor and the worst forms of child labor. As a follow up to the DRL AS's visit, on October 12-19, DRL Foreign Affairs Officer Tu Dang met with a wide range of stakeholders, including the government, NGOs, labor unions and other civil society organizations to discuss labor and corporate social responsibility issues. Meetings took place in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Kipushi, with a particular focus on labor practices in the extractive industry in the Katanga province.

Child labor: a reality in DRC mines

3. (U) During an October 13 meeting, the GDRC's Ministry of Labor Chief of Staff Henriette Minchiabu confirmed the existence of the worst forms of child labor in the DRC's mining sector. Minchiabu reported that children work in mines and stone quarries where they are involved in breaking stones and often transport heavy loads for the traders. She also said that children work as water sellers, domestic servants, and entertainers in bars and restaurants. She added that children continue to be recruited and used by armed groups for a variety of purposes. At the same time, Minchiabu denied the existence of forced labor in the DRC. (Note: Forced labor is defined in accordance with ILO Convention 29 as

all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace or penalty for its nonperformance and for which the worker does not offer himself or herself voluntarily, and includes indentured labor. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Minchiabu continued that children are engaged in child labor because they don't have access to schooling. Additionally, children work to support their families, and this is particularly prevalent for those children who are the heads of their households, either because they have no parents or their parents are unemployed. She concluded that children want to stay in child labor because they enjoy earning money. (Comment: Post does not share Minchiabu's opinion that forced labor does not exist in the DRC. End comment.)

¶5. (U) The GDRC has addressed child labor through the labor code, children's law, penal code, civil code and other laws. However, the Ministry of Labor has yet to develop a national action plan to comprehensively address child labor. Minchiabu opined that preventive efforts should be the focus, particularly on raising awareness on exploitative child labor through the media. With regards to local capacity to address the issue of child labor, she pointed out that there are local NGOs who focus on the issue, but she was not aware of how many or exactly which ones. The priorities of the Ministry of Labor include addressing the high rate of unemployment and lack of funding for labor issues.

¶6. (U) A number of observers on the ground have backed Minchiabu's statement that child labor is prevalent in the DRC. For example, Jean Mayombe, Vice President of the leading DRC union "Confederation Syndicale du Congo," (CSC) and his colleagues also confirmed the existence of child labor in the DRC's mining sector due to a lack of social protections, inadequate enforcement of labor laws and the lack of training for women. Mayombe estimated that 95 percent of the DRC workforce is in the informal sector.

¶7. (U) Solidarity Center Program Director Michael Schwaabe told Dang on October 13 that an increasing number of children are working in Kolwezi mines in the southern Katanga province. Catholic Relief Services in Katanga (CRS) explained that the local population's interest in working in the mining sector is based on the lack of alternative sources of income. Increasingly, children and adults are drawn to work in the mines due to the easy-money mentality. Mining companies often pay higher salaries than other sectors and for many mining is the best-paid job.

¶8. (U) The UNICEF Chief in Katanga, Roger Bottrahy, observed that labor practices are different for different minerals and ores. He reported that forced labor exists in the northern Katanga province where the soldiers force children and adults to mine for them or to transport heavy packages. He also said that child labor exists within the Congolese military (FARDC) especially in Kamina, Pueto, and Kalemie (all in Katanga province) where 91 children soldiers live. (Note: UNICEF is not supporting these children directly, but monitors their situation. End note.)

¶9. (U) Bottrahy noted that this issue is so sensitive that UNICEF is required to present an official letter

prior to visiting these children. He reported that indigenous cultural practices, like witchcraft, play an integral part in the prevalence of street children. For example, there is a practice of branding children with handicaps or even minor abnormalities (e.g. speech defects, learning disabilities, etc.) as "witches," which results in parents abandoning their child and leaving them for a life in the streets. He furthermore noted that 8-10 year old girls, called the "canetons" (ducklings in French) are forced into prostitution by the "madams" in the mining areas of Katanga in order to make money.

¶10. (U) Marcel Munene, who is the Director of the DRC parastatal copper and cobalt mining firm Gecamines in Kipushi, also confirmed the existence of child labor in the artisanal mines. He deplored the fact that children are working in the mines and opined that children and adults are ignorant of proper mining techniques and mining safety standards, which places them at increased risk of injury or death. Munene noted that the deepest mine in DRC is located at Kipushi, which has a depth of 1,490 meters. According to Munene, the GDRC should adopt a long-term solution by installing new infrastructure, acquiring new equipment, converting some of its mining activities into agriculture, and providing training to young people. He estimated that the restoration of Gecamines' infrastructure in Kipushi would require at least USD 60 million in funding, but a feasibility study would first need to be conducted. While he noted that child labor is a problem in the mining sector, he stated that it is out of the scope of his mandate to follow-up on such issues. Qof the scope of his mandate to follow-up on such issues.

¶11. (U) During a visit to a stone quarry in Kipushi on the Gecamines' compound, DRL Officer witnessed children, women and men working. Children were mostly engaged in breaking stones and carrying loads. Women were involved in digging and breaking stones, while some mothers were carrying their babies in their arms while breaking stones. When asked why they work, the children replied that they wanted to financially support their parents and besides, they didn't have money for schooling. However, most of the children interviewed indicated that they would rather go to school than be in the mines.

#### Actions taken to combat child labor

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¶12. (U) Both the GDRC and other private organizations have implemented a number of programs to combat child labor in the DRC. For instance, Minchiabu claimed that 30,000 child soldiers have been demobilized as a result of a vocational training program supported by the Ministry of Labor and implemented by the Solidarity Center and Save the Children. Solidarity Center Program Director Michael Schwaabe reported that his NGO combats the worst forms of child labor in collaboration with the NGOs and trade unions. One project which Solidarity Center in conjunction with Save the Children is implementing is the USDOL-funded

?Reducing the Exploitation of Working Children Through Education? (REETE) Program. The REETE Project targets 8,000 children for withdrawal and 4,000 children for prevention from mining, mining-related services, small-scale commerce, agro-pastoral activities and the worst forms of child labor in the Katanga Province, the Kasai Orientale Province, and the Ituri District.

¶13. (U) Francois Philippart, PACT Manager in Katanga, and Yves Bawa, Regional PACT Manager in Ituri, Oriental Province, stated that their NGO has been promoting social reintegration of the street children back into their communities while dealing with female illiteracy and conflict resolution in the extractive industries. They shared that children work largely because of economic reasons, or lack of schooling or other opportunities. PACT noted that child labor is a problem and said that they would be interested in coordinating with the ILO and other NGOs to improve workers' rights. They reported that diggers generally know the market price for their mined products but they have no choice but to accept the low price paid by the broker. They suggested that promoting small business development in the Katanga region would create jobs, decrease local dependence on imports, and diversify skill sets. Since 2003, PACT has focused on community empowerment, livelihoods promotion and natural resource management.

¶14. (U) UNICEF is currently working with NGOs to take children out of the mines. UNICEF has initiated income-generating activities for children's parents through NGOs as an incentive for them to keep their children out of child labor and in school. Jeff Imans of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) mentioned that the labor practices of smaller mining companies are problematic. Other concerns include the problem of smuggling minerals to other countries, and the continual use of child soldiers. He announced that IRC will start a child protection program soon in Kolwezi, as well as a gender-based violence project in Katanga. For the moment, IRC is engaged in community reconstruction based on education, health, and the environment. IRC is implementing a health project funded by the World Bank.

¶15. (U) Finally, Yero De and Dolet Nyembo of the Q15. (U) Finally, Yero De and Dolet Nyembo of the International Labor Organization (ILO) noted ILO's involvement in addressing labor practices in both industrial and artisanal mining in Katanga province. The

ILO is currently working with a Belgian NGO called ?Group One? to withdraw children from the mines and eradicate child labor. The ILO proposes a three-pronged approach: 1) organize diggers into cooperatives in order to improve their working conditions; 2) improve working conditions in mining companies; and 3) promote social dialogue between workers, companies, and the government. ILO reps noted that the GDRC, public and private unions, enterprises, and the ILO have started a tripartite dialogue framework on child labor. He suggested that creating employment opportunities, strengthening the skills of women, enrolling children back in school, and decreasing DRC reliance on imports should be on the top of the agenda for the GDRC.

Comment  
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¶16. (U) DRL Officer Tu Dang's visit underscored the fact that child labor remains a serious problem in DRC's mining sector. Her trip offered a forum to emphasize that U.S. laws prohibit the import of products made with forced

labor,  
including by children. Moreover, it provided an  
opportunity  
to see first-hand the working conditions of some miners.  
Post will continue to monitor developments related to  
child  
and forced labor in the DRC and to advocate for their  
eradication. End comment.

[¶17.](#) (U) This cable was/was cleared by Ms. Tu Dang.

GARVELINK